



Jason Zuidema, *Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and the Outward Instruments of Divine Grace*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 2008

Dr. Zuidema has written a very engaging monograph shedding light on one of the lesser known Reformers. He peppers his presentation with plenty of evidence from secondary, and even more importantly, primary sources. Vermigli appears here not as an afterthought or the concern of specialists but as someone every student of historical theology and church history should become well acquainted with.

Specifically, Z. discusses the ‘outward instruments of grace’ (primarily the Lord’s Supper) within the larger context of Vermigli’s historical Sitz im Leben. The first chapter, accordingly, places Vermigli in his historical setting; the second discusses ‘carnalized’ religion; the third, Vermigli’s Christology; the fourth, Vermigli’s understanding of Scripture; the fifth, ‘bending the knee to Scripture’; and finally, the sixth, union with Christ. Each chapter is thoroughly interlaced with the preceding ones and unlike some monographs in which each section can stand as an independent treatment of whatever topic is under discussion, Z.’s requires each in order for the whole to be understood.

Z. sets the agenda early on, writing

The present essay is broadly one of historical theology. It assumes that Vermigli acted and wrote, at least if we are to accept him at his word, in the belief that the sovereign God of the biblical narrative was still supremely at work in history. Hence, social, economic, and political motives are important in an assessment of his thought, but not primary. Most of the focus of this essay will be on the theological writings of Vermigli (p. 12).

In other words, Vermigli had wide-ranging interests, but the focus presently is on his theological work. Z. continues

In Vermigli's thought we see a dynamic understanding of the Word of God. His thought links the *incarnate* Word of God, Jesus Christ the Second Person of the Trinity, the *audible* Words of God in written Scripture and preached word, and the *visible* Words of God, the sacraments. Not only is the link between these 'outward elements' biblical, but all three have an analogical relationship with one another (p. 15).

It is this dynamism of the Word (as found in Scripture and in the person of Christ) that seems the hallmark of Vermigli's work (and Z.'s as well). The Word (in Christ, and Scripture), is alive and active and Vermigli understands that quite well. Which makes him sound not only Reformed, but downright Calvinistic.

When Z. asks whether Vermigli was 'Calvinist', his answer is unequivocal:

Vermigli was certainly Reformed, but was never, nor did he ever aspire to be, a 'Calvinist' (p. 33).

Z. reiterates his purpose in writing before fully developing his theme:

The present essay seeks to further scholarship on Vermigli through an examination of his thought on the outward instruments of salvation. These are the earthly instruments that God uses to effect his grace. God reveals his grace in his 'Word'—such Word *incarnate* in his Son, *audible* in Scripture, and *visible* in the sacraments. For Vermigli all three are to be understood neither in some over-carnalized sense, nor in some over-spiritualized sense. Rather he wanted to understand each in its proper sense. He considered this a delicate task for the theologian. Vermigli typically thought in his theologizing to be a man in the middle; not someone who bent theological words so as to be pleasing to all sides, but one who carefully defined and explicated the Word of God as far as possible to represent true Christianity (p. 35).

Most interesting – to this reviewer at any rate – in Z.'s treatment of Vermigli's theology is his exposition of Vermigli's attitude towards Scripture:

Vermigli's approach to interpreting Scripture begins with the principle that all things necessary for salvation are clearly revealed.²⁰⁴ As such, he counters the argument that Scripture is too obscure for the common man to understand. On the contrary, argues Vermigli, God's revelation in Scripture is much clearer than that found anywhere else (i.e. in philosophy or nature):

And then he quotes Vermigli (which he does regularly throughout the volume)

Some men complain that the Scriptures are so hard that from them few can build the house of God. Still these men ought to know that those things which are necessary for salvation are easily understood by all men. God no less provides for men in this respect than he does in the nature of things where undoubtedly we see that those things which are necessary for life are not hard to get.

Then it is merely a trick played on us to say that those things which help for salvation are very intricate and obscure for us in the holy Scriptures (p. 127).

His discussion of the Lord's Supper too is quite engaging. And, once more, this seems the central interest of his dissertation (and it's important to note at this point that the present volume is in fact a revised doctoral dissertation):

Vermigli is in agreement with Zwingli that this eating is not carnal, again over against the Lutherans, but is against Zwingli in that the eating does have something to do with the outward elements of the sacrament. In the conclusion to his treatise, Vermigli writes:

So once more Z. cites Vermigli:

Then again, they [the Zwinglians] have not always recognized the power belonging to it [the sacrament]. For these are no ordinary signs, but such as may move the mind powerfully and effectively. They will say that this attributes too much to elements of this world. We answer that it is not attributed to them for their own sake, but on account of the institution of the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the clarity of the words (p. 156).

This may illustrate best of all why Vermigli is so very interesting and why he is so important: he cannot be classified as Zwinglian, Calvinist, or any other subset of 'Reformed'. Though he is clearly Reformed. He manages to be his own thinker- combining the best of Reformed thought absent the bickering which sadly characterized the second generation reformers.

Z. is to be commended for bringing to life, and light, a scholar who is worthy of far more attention that he has received. And though this volume appeared in 2008, it remains unsurpassed in terms of guiding scholarship to a proper appreciation of Vermigli's central thought.

Jim West
The Philippines Baptist Theological Seminary